



Vol. 13, No. 3

The Iguana



Feb. 9, 2001

News

**New Horizons 2001
kicks off**

Page 3

**Born under fire:
remembering fallen
Winged Warriors**

Page 4

**Maintaining the
means to fight**

Page 5

Features

**African-American
History Month:
Remembering the
Tuskegee Airmen**

Page 6

**CJA offers tax
assistance**

Page 8

**Hiking into
heavens of Laguna**

Page 8

News Briefs

Page 8

Putting "Eye" back into team

Surgeons restore sight to Hondurans in Santa Barbara

By Master Sgt. Pat McKenna
Public Affairs

When Maj. Miriam Talley saw 10-year-old Edgardo running barefoot through the halls at Hospital Integrado in Santa Barbara, Honduras, the nurse anesthetist immediately "adopted" him for the duration of her two-week stay.

"He was adorable, so cute with so much energy, that I took him under my wing," said Talley, who was part of a military medical team from Wilford Hall Medical Center, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, conducting an eye surgery medical readiness training exercise.

The major made it her mission to make life a little better for young Edgardo for the short time she was in country. One evening, while the boy slept, Talley measured his feet while he slept in a hospital bed, and the next morning bought him a new pair of sneakers.

And while Edgardo left the hospital looking good, you could also say he went home "seeing" good, too. Talley noticed, when she could get Edgardo to slow down long enough, that the boy's eyes "looked funny." The boy suffered from a condition called exotropia, which is when your eyes deviate outwards. Talley sent the boy to get his mother, who was a patient in the hospital, so they could get her permission to operate and correct the problem. The mother consented.

Fortunately, Edgardo happened to luck into getting his eyes fixed, nearly on the spot for that matter. More than 700 other patients, who filed into Hospital Integrado from Jan. 26 to Feb. 9, also felt lucky to see the U.S. eye experts, even if they did have to make an appointment. Some patients had to walk for days just to get to the hospital, but to them it was well worth it.

"Most of these patients are too poor to pay for surgery at private clinics, and the waiting lists at the public hospitals in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula are too long," said Dr. Ricardo Aviles, one of the Soto Cano's medical liaisons. "For



Photo by Master Sgt. Pat McKenna

Maj. Annette Williamson and Maj. Randall Collins, both optometrists from the Wilford Hall Medical Center, Lackland AFB, Texas, examine patients at Hospital Integrado in Santa Barbara. The pair were participating in an optometry and ophthalmology medical readiness training exercise in the town, and estimate that they will issue more than 600 pairs of glasses by the end of their trip.

many, this is their only chance to see again."

Aviles has seen first-hand the profound impact these eye surgery missions have on the local population, coordinating more than a dozen of the MEDRETEs. The first such exercise was conducted in 1993 at Santa Teresa Hospital in Comayagua. The doctor immediately found the eye surgery mission one of the most rewarding of all of the so-called "specialty" MEDRETEs.

"The transformation is incredible," Aviles said. "They come in blind and leave with sight. Afterwards, you feel like you've really made a difference. It's what keeps me going."

Aviles remembers the particularly sad case of a 32-year-old man who was ushered around everywhere by his wife.

"Someone always had to stay at home with the man, because he couldn't take care of himself," the doctor said. "Either his wife had to miss work or one of the children had to miss school."

"But after the surgery, the man could see again. And the first thing he did was grab his wife's arm and started pulling her around. Now, he was the leader. He was the man again."

Another case the doctor soon won't soon forget involved a 22-year-old

woman, who lost her sight as a teenager because of diabetes. When the surgeons unwrapped the gauze from her eyes, the woman stared straight ahead blankly and began to cry. Aviles was heartbroken; the surgery had not worked ... or so the doctor thought. He soon learned, however, the woman was crying tears of joy. She had finally had her sight restored.

"I cried with her," Aviles said. "And in medicine, it's those days you live for."

By the end of the MEDRETE, the team had conducted about 70 surgeries, repairing damaged eyes and conditions ranging from cataracts and glaucoma to strabismus (a deviation in the direction of the eyes) and diabetic retinopathy. The team brought down most of their equipment, including state-of-the-art diode and YAG lasers.

They left behind about 600 pairs of eyeglasses that military optometrists prescribed. They also left behind Edgardo.

"I wish I could've wrapped him up and taken him with us," Talley said. "When you see some of the conditions that the poor must endure, it just breaks your heart. But I'm grateful I came and that we could help at least a few patients who would've otherwise not received the care."

Commanders' Corner

Army PT improves fitness, strengthens unit morale

By CPT Joshua Keesal and CPT Michael Perkins
MEDEL

The military is the only professional organization around that continually places emphasis on collective physical fitness. IBM and Microsoft do not make their employees assemble at some God-forsaken hour in the morning, "extend to the left," and conduct physical training, "PT." And though IBM and Microsoft primarily need only employees who are computer experts, if they really understood the benefits of a collective physical fitness program, Bill Gates would take his stretch limo to his office every morning an hour earlier to participate in "Microsoft PT."

The U.S. Army's Physical Training program not only makes bodies stronger and more disciplined, it strengthens unit morale and cohesion and offers junior soldiers the opportunity to lead. However, more emphasis needs to put on the quality of today's physical training. Knocking out the "Dirty Dozen" or running everyday is no longer good enough. With a little preparation and a good imagination, good leaders can develop an interesting and rewarding PT program.

Physical Training as a group makes your body stronger and more disciplined. It is a known fact that regular physical exercise strengthens the body, increases the efficiency of the heart and cardiovascular system, and creates countless other life-long benefits for healthy living. Stretching increases flexibility and decreases your chance of injury. It therefore comes as no surprise that an organization like the military, which needs strong and healthy bodies to exercise and enforce the political will of our country, is committed to building up its members through regular stretching and exercise.

Physical training as a group strengthens unit morale and cohesion. Some people argue that the time

wasted during stretching and waiting on others is taking away from workout time the person would have had have had they worked out on their own. That is absolutely true in some cases. But the majority of people, if the Army did not say that we have to conduct PT, would sleep in until 10 minutes before work call. The overall benefits outweigh the disadvantage of holding a few PT "studs" back. Remember, it is always possible to go above and beyond by exercising on your personal time. Every time a team succeeds together in the face of adversity, it grows stronger as a collective unit. This is true as well for unit PT.

Each time you and your peers successfully finish another painful workout led by SSG Pain or SPC Muscle failure, the team grows stronger. Also, by working out beside their soldiers, officers can lead by example. Additionally, soldiers will see that their officers are not afraid of hard work and working together as a team. The benefit of this interaction, which often exposes peoples' true personalities, manifests in increased morale and unit efficiency.

Physical training as a group offers junior soldiers an opportunity to observe and eventually practice being a leader. Often in the Army, the first time junior soldiers stand in front of formation is when they are assigned a week of leading PT. Since they have seen it done a million times, and since there are plenty of good NCOs who want to and do help them prepare, the soldiers succeed at their assigned tasks. This success leads to other successes, prepares them for the future challenges they will face as an NCO, and encourages them to grow as individuals and as leaders in the military.

In July 1950, U.S. troops, unprepared for the physical demands of combat, were sent to battle. The results were disastrous. Task Force-Smith was routed by a poorly equipped, but well-trained North Korean Army. The costly lessons learned in Korea are as important today as ever.

The U.S. Army Physical Fitness School in Fort Benning, Ga., is working hard to modify existing PT doctrine to meet the needs of today's streamlined, "high-speed" Army. Physical fitness training regulations are currently being revamped and updated to include the latest innovations in health and fitness. It is an excellent resource for developing and conducting a PT program that is well planned and organized, has reasonable yet challenging requirements, and is competitive and progressive.

Another good source of up-to-date information is the Internet. The Army Physical Fitness School's web page offers additional resources at www.benning.army.mil/usapfs.

The U.S. Army's Physical Fitness program is based upon years of experience, research and practice. It strengthens the body and mind of all who participate; it strengthens the collective body and spirit of the unit; and it strengthens the confidence and leadership skills of its current and future junior leaders.

So the next time you grumble at the sound of your alarm clock, don't. Be thankful that you have your health and strength, and that you are working in a professional organization that values your health, teamwork and your growth as a leader.

President addresses servicemembers, civilians

To the armed forces of the United States and to the men and women who support them.

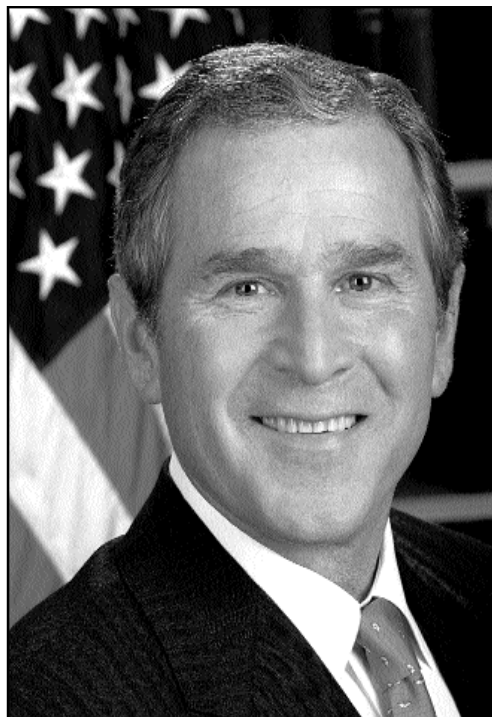
Your service in the cause of freedom is both noble and extraordinary. Because of you, America is strong and the flame of freedom burns brighter than at any time in history.

Your country can never repay you for the sacrifices and hardships you endure, but we are grateful for the liberties we enjoy every day because of your service.

As your Commander-in-Chief, I will always support you and your families so that this great nation continues to have the greatest armed forces in the history of the world.

Thank you.

**- Hon. George W. Bush,
President of the United States**



The Iguana



EDITORIAL STAFF
JTF-Bravo Commander
COL Michael Wood

Public Affairs Director
1st Lt. Kim Garbett

Superintendent
Master Sgt. Patrick McKenna

Editor
SPC Jeremy Heckler

Photo technician
Martin Chahin

E-mail: pao@jtfb-emh1.army.mil

Website: <http://www.southcom.mil/home/jtfbravo>

This funded, joint U.S. Air Force/Army newspaper is an authorized publication for members of the U.S. military overseas. Contents of The Iguana do not necessarily reflect the official view of, and are not endorsed by, the U.S. government, Department of Defense or the departments of the Air Force or Army.

Content is edited, prepared and provided by the Joint Task Force-Bravo Public Affairs Office, in Building D-06. Telephone numbers are 011-504-234-4634, ext. 4150 or 4676. Fax is ext. 4550. or DSN 449-4150/4676. Readers with story ideas should call the Public Affairs office. All photographs are property of JTF-Bravo unless otherwise noted.

PRINTED BY PUBLYNESA

That's your opinion

What do you think is romantic?

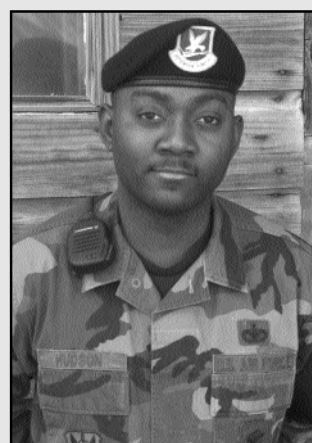


"I like candlelight, music, flowers, and a nice romantic setting."

SPC Lakeshia Wilson
MEDEL

"To me going out to the park on a Saturday with a sheet spread out for a barbecue and a nice picnic with someone you feel comfortable with is romantic."

SFC Andy Ramirez
ARFOR



"I'd like for my girl to bring me breakfast in bed because it's something someone like me would never think of."

Tech Sgt. Wiley Hudson
Joint Security Forces

"I like a fancy restaurant and a good bottle of wine just because it's fun and something different."

1LT Kristine Hartz
ARFOR



Photo by Master Sgt. Pat McKenna

SFC Ramon Allende and SPC Manuel Rodrigues, from the 130th Engineering Battalion, measure the dimensions of the foundation of a schoolhouse in Coalaca. The two Army Guardsmen from Puerto Rico are part of Task Force-Lempira, a New Horizons exercise in Gracias, Lempira, Honduras.

New Horizons kicks off in Honduras, Guatemala

By 1st Lt. Kim Garbett
Public Affairs

New Horizons 2001 officially kicks off with opening ceremonies today in the vicinity of Gracias, Lempira, in western Honduras, Task Force-Lempira. Joint Task Force-Lempira's mission is to build four three-room schools with latrines and three two-room clinics in Gracias, Lempira, Honduras.

More than 2,000 United States active duty, Reserve and Guard military members representing all services from units worldwide will participate in Joint Task Force-Lempira from January to May 2001.

Members from Joint Task Force-Bravo, 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment from Soto Cano and the 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment out of Alaska, will also provide support for these New Horizons exercises.

New Horizons exercises are humanitarian and civil assistance missions designed to foster goodwill and improve relations between the United States and the host nation.

A typical New Horizons exercise consists of engineering construction projects and medical readiness training exercises.

Engineers focus on building schools and clinics, digging wells and improving roads. Medical specialists provide routine surgery and treatment, including tonsillectomies and cleft palate reconstruction, that would otherwise be unavailable to many of the locals.

New Horizons also provides the United States with an opportunity to train our soldiers in the austere environment they will see in future operations.



Feb. 9, 2001

JTF-Bravo

Born under Fire: Remembering fallen Winged Warriors

By 1st Lt. Kim Garbett
Public Affairs

Their motto was "Born Under Fire." They dedicated their lives to their country. They served in the name of doing what was right and what was for the greater good. They wore their uniforms proudly. They lost their lives for their country. Thus was the legacy of three members of the 4th Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment, who died on Jan. 2, 1991, in service to the United States. More than 10 years later, these men, who died in El Salvador that January day, long ago, are gone but not forgotten.

On Jan. 26, 2001, in honor of the memories of these men, the 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment, whose motto is "One Team ... One Fight," hosted a wreath-laying ceremony. The ceremony was held in front of the battalion's headquarters on a crisp and sunny Honduran morning.

The story of that fated day more than 10 years ago is an amazingly tragic one. CPT Chris Buckner, project officer for the wreath-laying ceremony, retold the events that unfolded according to the historical records. "On Jan. 2, 1991, the initial battalion commander, LTC David Pickett,

and his crew were killed," he began. "Their helicopter (a UH-1 Huey), flying back from El Salvador, was shot down by hostile ground fire near Lolotique, El Salvador. The crew auto rotated down the side of a hill after crossing a ridgeline and being ambushed by rebels.

"The aircraft crashed into a four-foot boulder and then rotated 185 degrees around it. CW4 Daniel Scott was killed instantly, as his side of the aircraft struck the boulder. PFC Ernest Dawson was rendered unconscious by injuries sustained in the crash sequence, and LTC Pickett survived the impact and was remarkably conscious."

Buckner went on to say that then, several local farmers were forced at gunpoint by the rebels to drag the crew out of the helicopter. LTC Pickett had asked for some water. The rebels directed the farmers to go and get some water. After the farmers had crossed the ridgeline of the hill, however, the rebels shot PFC Dawson once in the head and then LTC Pickett with two bursts of automatic weapons fire.

The 1980s and early 1990s were a tu-

multuous period in El Salvador and its neighbors. LTC Scott Ciluffo, commander of the 1-228th Aviation Regiment, gave a brief history lesson to the crowd. Civil unrest was at an all-time high in Central America and especially in El Salvador. It was the era of the Contras and Sandanistas. For the non-history buffs, El Salvador was going through a period of building border tensions between the Nicaragua Contras and Sandanistas.

"El Salvadoran (FMLN) and Honduran Forces, fueled by abject poverty, isolated geographic locations, and oppressive governments festered like an unhealing wound, and the turmoil reached explosive proportions," Ciluffo said. "As Americans, however, I'm sure that LTC Pickett and his crew suspected that there was always a remote chance that they may be in 'harm's way,' but after all, they were Americans, and America was not at war with these three countries."

So, why them, why there, why then? The families of these three fallen comrades have probably asked themselves these questions a thousand times, Ciluffo said. Was it bad luck? An accident, some undisciplined soldiers, or a misidentification? Was it a random act of crazed, war hungry rebels, or was it just fate?

Ciluffo said the conclusion he came to hit him like a stroke of lightning. "Perhaps their passing was to serve as a wake-up call to all the soldiers that were to come after them, to shine like a beacon for all to see," he said.

To the families of these three fallen men-at-arms, Ciluffo said, "On behalf of a grateful nation, we ask that they accept our most humble condolences and our most heartfelt thanks. For the sacrifices they all have made, although seemingly imperceptible by us, (these men) continue to serve as that beacon for us, and for those yet to come."

A quote from former U.S. president Lyndon Johnson punctuated these statements by Ciluffo. "No man should think that peace comes easily," Johnson said. "Peace does not come merely by wanting it, or shouting for it, or marching down main street for it. Peace is built brick by brick, mortared by the stubborn effort and the total energy and imagination of able and dedicated men. And it is built in the living faith that, in the end, man can and will master his own destiny."

The sacrifices of the families and the ultimate sacrifice these three men made

"Perhaps their passing was to serve as a wake-up call to all the soldiers that were to come after them, to shine like a beacon for all to see."

LTC Scott Ciluffo
1st Battalion, 228th
Aviation Regiment



Photo by 1st Lt. Kim Garbett

Members of 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment honor the crew of LTC David Pickett, CW4 Daniel Scott and PFC Ernest Dawson on the 10th anniversary of their deaths at a memorial ceremony held Jan. 26.

more than 10 years ago helped build a foundation in Central America, Ciluffo mentioned. "I submit that these three outstanding soldiers whom we honor today helped build the foundation of peace that reigns here in Central America. Their supreme sacrifice — not only for the United States, but for all our neighbors throughout the region— once again served as a beacon to enlighten leaders and illuminate the senselessness of random bloodshed. (Their sacrifice) also codified that freedom and peace come with a price."

The wreath of fresh flowers was laid near the 228th Aviation Regiment memorial for these men, erected in the early 1990s in honor and recognition of their sacrifice.

All 1-228th Aviation Regiment members were present by company in the ceremony.

Commanders and directors from Joint Task Force-Bravo also attended the ceremony.

An 18-gun salute, with three volleys from six guns, broke the silence that reverberated through the air after roll call when the names of the three missing men killed in action were called but were not answered. The playing of "Taps" punctuated the somberness of the moment.

A missing-man formation composed of helicopters representing all Winged Warrior companies highlighted the end of the ceremony. A CH-47 Chinook, two UH-60 Blackhawks and a UH-60 MEDEVAC honored their fallen comrades right after the playing of "Taps."

Ciluffo ended his speech, "Our continued challenge as soldiers remain unchanged ... when the guns are silent, and we stand on the threshold of peace, we cannot become complacent. ...remain vigilant, guard your post and protect those that are unable to protect themselves. As Winged Warriors, these three truly were 'Born Under Fire' and continue to be the embodiment of all Winged Warriors, past, present and future..."

Rappelling from helicopters not for faint-hearted

By 1st Lt. Kim Garbett
Public Affairs

You don't want to be afraid of heights for this operation. Or, "just don't look down!" as my flight training officer once said to some cadets back in officer basic training. It takes skill, technique and guts to head off the side of a rappel tower or swing backwards down a rope off of a hovering helicopter. Actually, rappelling, for as often as it is associated with mountain climbing and the great outdoors, is an animal of a different color in the military.

According to CW2 Jason Harrell, a UH-60 Blackhawk pilot with Company A, 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment, "Rappelling is a special insertion method originally designed for military use in urban operations. It is most frequently used to insert a team on the top of a building in a city. The team will rappel or fast rope out of a helicopter to a building to capture a criminal, or to extract bombs, people, or information. They used this most recently in Mogadishu, Somalia."

At Soto Cano and in Central America, rappelling is a multipurpose insertion tool. One of Joint Task Force-Bravo's missions is search and rescue.

The members on the SAR team must be able to rappel into a site regardless of where it is, be it in triple-canopy jungle, onto snow-capped mountains or onto

building tops, just like the superheroes in the comic books. The SAR team could be called upon anytime, anywhere in Central America to use their skills. From locating personnel in downed helicopters to natural disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes, they have been called upon to assist in a number of real-world missions in the past year. Also, rappel techniques are used by military personnel stationed here in Central Skies counterdrug operations throughout Central America; rappelling into an area where marijuana or other illicit narcotics may be in triple-canopy jungle is not always a safe or easy task to accomplish.

"They use rappelling here mainly for the SAR team to be inserted into a tight landing zone (LZ) that you can't fit a helicopter safely into," said Harrell. "The Costa Rican counterdrug missions in August 2000 are the most recent I know of using rappelling and SPIES (special patrol insertion/extraction system) in real-world operations here at Soto Cano. Sometimes, slopes were too steep or you couldn't fit a helicopter into an LZ because of the triple-canopy jungle, so the only other options to accomplish the mission were special insertion and extraction methods."

Rappelling can be made more challenging by external factors, such as high winds, said Harrell. With blades spinning within feet of the trees for sometimes extended periods of time, this can be challenging for the air crew.



Photo by 1st Lt. Kim Garbett

Members of the SAR team rappel out of a UH-60 Blackhawk.

Anytime you're in a helicopter with the engines running and the blades spinning and people jumping out, you have to be extra careful, stressed Harrell. "People's lives are at stake," he said, and for a pilot and crew, that's always a huge responsibility. Safety is always a priority when it comes to flying, and it is heightened in operations like rappelling. Crew coordination on these types of missions is always critical as well; the crew needs to be much more clear and concise with their actions and words when someone is hanging outside the aircraft on a rope.

"A steady hover needs to be maintained because you could wind up dragging the belay personnel (those holding the ropes at the bottom) or causing the rappellers to lose their footing upon exiting the aircraft backwards," he said.

Harrell said that overall, though, rappelling is a pretty cool mission.

"All the special purpose missions are fun missions because you're dealing with the special operations community and other specialized units. It's not your everyday mission, and the rules change in these types of operations," said Harrell.

Unit armorers help troops maintain weapons of warfighting

By SPC Jeremy Heckler
Iguana Editor

Every year, soldiers make the annual trip to the installation live-fire qualification range on the weapon of choice, be it pistol, rifle or M-60. When a misfire occurs, soldiers know the remedial and corrective actions

to fix the problem. Anything more than that is beyond their level of ability and left to the unit armorer.

For a small group of soldiers and airmen here at Soto Cano, they took that step beyond during the unit armorer's course held Jan 29 through Feb. 1.

"Due to Soto Cano's remoteness we are giving a special maintenance class to train assigned personnel to maintain and repair assigned weapons," said Al Perry, one of the instructors of the course from Tank Automotive and Command Maintenance. Joint Task Force-Bravo armorers must go beyond basic operator maintenance because there is no direct support unit that performs unit maintenance.

Perry and his partner Pat Hall started off his class with the basics, such as the proper use of tools and the function of each weapon as well as basic troubleshooting techniques.

"There is a lot of hands-on training in this class, but we also try and reinforce use of the manual," said Perry.

Many of the students take a closer look at a weapon they haven't seen

since they qualified at the range.

"The last time I worked on an M-16, all I did was fire and clean it back in basic training," said PFC Terrence Rush of ARFOR. Tearing apart the weapon, he found more to it than the upper receiver, lower receiver and bolt carrier group.

"I found that there are a lot of springs and parts that need to be put back in just the right way or the weapon won't fire," said Rush.

"The normal operator won't see how many parts are required to fire the rifle," said Tech Sgt. Gene Cressy of Joint Security Forces. He said that the course allowed him to turn his knowledge as a certified gunsmith into practical experience. That experience allowed him to help tutor others on how to take a weapon apart and put it back together.

"I think that, with all of the parts, I could comfortably assemble a weapon for myself," said Cressy.

"This class got more into breaking down weapons further than what we usually do," said SPC Chris Morris, Company A, 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment. Morris, a former unit armorer, brought some of his tricks of the trade to the class.

"I was an armorer for two and a half years, and I showed some of the ways to do it quicker and easier by showing common problems, such as what the operator might do to make the weapon malfunction and how to make it work correctly," said Morris.

Whatever their skill level, many of these troopers will go back to their unit with practical knowledge that will help them downrange.

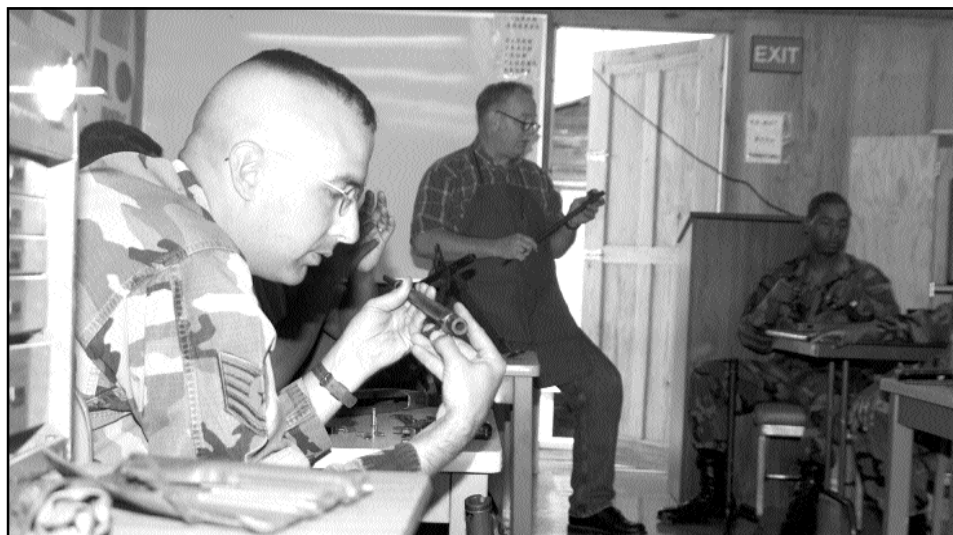


Photo by Martin Chahin

Tech Sgt. Gene Cressy of Joint Security Forces inspects a part of an M-60 during the Unit Armorer's Course. The course taught the in's and out's of a variety of weapons as well as how to repair them.

Feb. 9, 2001

JTF-Bravo

African-American History Month**Tuskegee Airmen endured prejudice to serve their country****By Master Sgt. Pat McKenna**
Public Affairs

On Aug. 24, 1944, fighter pilot Charles McGee peeled away from a squadron of American bombers to repel a covey of enemy "bandits." The Luftwaffe fighters "buzzed in from nowhere," as McGee puts it, to menace the plodding B-24 Liberator bombers, which were on a mission to destroy a rail yard and aerodrome in Czechoslovakia.

McGee, flying a P-51 Mustang he'd nicknamed "Kitten" after his wife and because of the way it purred, zeroed in on a Focke-Wulf 190. As the planes spiraled downward, McGee hugged his enemy's "six" and unleashed his .50-caliber machine guns, peppering the enemy aircraft full of holes and slicing it apart.

In the air, bomber crews lauded him as a hero. But on the ground, airmen shunned him. You see, underneath the mask and helmet, McGee was black. The officer belonged to a band of pioneering fliers, who proved that African-Americans had the smarts and guts to fly and fight. They paved the way for integrating the Air Force, armed services, and, many say, America. These pilots and their ground crews came to be known as the Tuskegee Airmen.

McGee flew with the 332nd Fighter Group, an all-black flying unit composed of the 99th, 100th, 301st and 302nd fighter squadrons. More than 50 years ago in July, the group (by then a wing) deactivated, marking the official

end of segregated flying by all-black Air Force units.

By war's end, the 332nd "Red Tails," so nicknamed because of the solid crimson paint scheme on their aircraft tails, amassed an enviable service record, destroying or damaging 409 enemy aircraft and flying 15,553 sorties and 1,578 missions. About 200 of the missions took them deep into the Rhineland, providing escort to the heavy bombers. The Red Tails didn't lose a single bomber to enemy fighters.

"We weren't caught up in becoming 'fighter aces.' Our mission was to protect the bombers, and that's what we did. We engaged the enemy when we were challenged," said McGee, a retired colonel living in Bethesda, Md. "I even heard some talk that bomber crews, when given a choice, requested us to provide their top cover. They weren't stupid."

The Army Air Corps had completely barred blacks from their ranks until 1941, and the other services assigned blacks to menial duties. The military cited a 1925 study conducted by the Army War College, which concluded that black soldiers, by nature, were physically, mentally and psychologically unfit for combat duty.

"People said aviation and technical training were too complex for us to comprehend," said McGee, 81. "They said all blacks loved music and dancing, and that we were lazy and superstitious. But we proved them wrong."

Former President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the Army Air Corps to open its doors to African-Americans and teach blacks to fly. As a result, the service formed the 99th Pursuit Squadron, establishing an Army airfield near Tuskegee, Ala. The first group of flying cadets, Class 42C, began training in July 1941, and included 12 cadets and one student officer, Capt. Benjamin O. Davis Jr., son of Brig. Gen. Benjamin Davis Sr., the first black general in the U.S. military. Davis and four others graduated and earned their wings in March 1942.



Courtesy Photos

Retired Col. Charles McGee, retired Lt. Col. Woody Crockett and former Staff Sgt. Ellsworth Jackson (left to right) stand in front of a P-51 Mustang at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. The three men were members of the Tuskegee Airmen - the all-African-American combat flying unit during World War II.

At the same time, black enlisted ground crews received instruction in aircraft maintenance and other support skills at Chanute Field near Rantoul, Ill. The Air Corps segregated both Chanute and Tuskegee in a "separate but equal" policy, which was supposed to ease racial friction.

"Separate but equal was never equal," McGee said. "Their separate facilities were seldom of the same caliber or quality. We usually got hand-me-downs."

McGee still vividly remembers the ride by rail from his hometown in Champaign, Ill., to the Chehaw train station in Tuskegee. "The only thing I knew about aviation before then was throwing paper airplanes in the classroom. But I was excited, because I now had an opportunity to prove that it's not what you look like, but what you can do. Then the train hit the Mason-Dixon Line in Cairo, Ill., and the conductor moved all of us black folks into our own car, right behind the engine. And all the way to Alabama, I choked on coal dust."

Retired Lt. Col. Woodrow "Woody" Crockett, 82, spent two years in the regular Army before becoming a Tuskegee Airman. An Air Corps recruiting poster in the barracks caught his eye. It touted that a flying officer could earn \$245 a month, which appealed to the private who was only making \$21 a month.

"Plus, I was tired of sleeping in the mud and in the back of trucks," Crockett said. "I thought I'd take my chances getting blasted out of the sky during the day, so I could sleep well at night."

At Tuskegee, the airmen found them-

selves isolated and, as McGee said, "only went into town when we had to and then did it very gingerly." A few base leaders even made them feel unwelcome, resenting the "experiment" that exploited the military as a laboratory for social reform.

But, McGee, Crockett and 924 other black pilots made it through the Tuskegee Army Flying School — the last class, 46C, finished in June 1946.

"They said we didn't have the intelligence, the demeanor, the courage to be combat pilots," McGee said. "They learned differently. It was never about color; it was always about education and opportunity. All we needed was a chance and training. And we seized it when it came."

Their chance in combat came after months of delays by the War Department. The Tuskegee Airmen "hurried up and waited," some pilots accumulating more than 250-plus flying hours in training. Finally, in April 1943, military leaders folded to political pressure and deployed the 400-man 99th Pursuit Squadron to North Africa. Eventually, the 99th became part of the 332nd Fighter Group and joined their sister units based in Italy. The 332nd bounced around Italy's boot from Montecorvino Air Base near Salerno and Capodichino Air Field to their final overseas home at Ramitelli Air Field near Ancona.

For the Red Tails, 50 missions didn't earn them a ticket home, but only a 50-mission "crush" in their garrison caps.

See Tuskegee, Page 7



Charles McGee scored one kill during the war, flying in his P-51 Mustang that he nicknamed "Kitten."

Tuskegee

(Continued from Page 6)

McGee racked up 136 combat missions.

After the war, at Camp Patrick Henry in Newport News, Va., Crockett remembers how he was refused entrance into the officers club and was forced to take a seat in a special roped-off section of the base theater.

"But German prisoners of war could sit anywhere in the base theater they wanted," Crockett said. "Maybe that's why I don't like going to the movies."

"When we were overseas, we were accepted [by the Europeans]," McGee said. "We hardly ever experienced difficulties abroad, even with our white squadron mates. But when you brought that same group back to the States, that's when the alienation showed up. It wasn't 'Hey, Chuck,' anymore. They turned their backs on us. Peer pressure told them blacks and whites don't work and play together back here."

Some of the Red Tails' greatest missions included sinking an enemy destroyer using only machine guns, and their famed trek to Berlin in March 1945. Crockett, at the stick of his "Daisy Mae," was among 59 P-51 Red Tail pilots who flew one of the longest missions in the war.

They escorted B-17 bombers en route to level the Daimler-Benz tank works in the Nazi capital. The Red Tails downed three Me-262 jet fighters, the Third Reich's new secret weapon. By war's end, the Tuskegee Airmen had lost 66 pilots killed in combat, while 32 were shot down and became POWs.

McGee and Crockett joined the Air Force when it became a separate service in 1947. In fact, McGee is one of the few fighter pilots to see air combat in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

Second Lt. Oliver Goodall wasn't so lucky in pursuing a military career. He belonged to the ill-fated 477th Medium Bombardment Group (Colored) at Freeman Field in Seymour, Ind. The group's white commander clipped his men's wings before they ever saw action. He classified every black officer as a "trainee," and decreed the staff officer's club off limits to "trainees." Instead, the trainees, already flight-school graduates, had to use a second club, disparagingly dubbed "Uncle Tom's Cabin" by the white officers and housed in a di-



Courtesy Photo

Retired Lt. Col. Woody Crockett climbs into the cockpit of his P-51 Mustang, Daisy Mae.

lapidated building.

"The staff was white and the so-called trainees black — you figure it out," said Goodall, now 80. "It was unconstitutional, and I wasn't going to take it. We decided to walk into our officers club, and 101 of us were put under house arrest. When the war ended, they wanted to get rid of us, and they started with the troublemakers, which included me."

In July 1948, President Harry Truman issued Executive Order No. 9981, which mandated "equality of treatment and opportunity" for all members of the armed forces.

McGee said discrimination hurt most when it touched his family.

"What's the toughest assignment I faced? Trying to explain to my daughter Charlene why she couldn't play in the city park right across the street from our home," said McGee, now national president of Tuskegee Air-

men, Inc. "We were stationed at Maxwell Air Force Base, and living in downtown Montgomery. A sign in the park read 'No Blacks Allowed.' Now, how do you explain a thing like racism to an 8-year-old?"

Surprisingly, none of the men hold grudges.

"Sure, we could be bitter and miserable, and believe me, there are some who still have a chip on their shoulders," McGee said. "But I wanted to move on."

Says Crockett: "I also could've spent the rest of my life feeling resentment and would've ended up doing nothing. If we'd have waited until the playing field was level, we would've never gotten into the game."

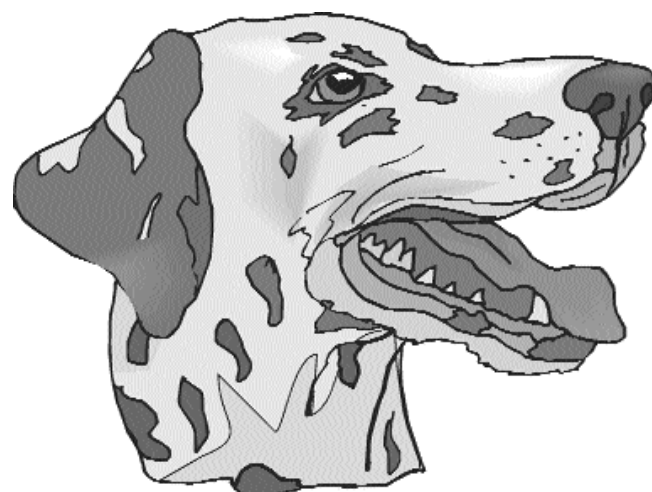
And thanks to the Tuskegee Airmen, those making the starting lineup of today's Air Force get chosen based on performance and character and not skin color.

These black vanguards, through their discipline, determination, airmanship and courage, helped make it happen.

Veterinary services does more than just treat animals

By SGT James Barclay
MEDEL

Most people probably have no idea what the veterinary services do here or even what they do back at your home station. Veterinary services have important roles to play in support of both preventive medicine and force



protection issues

Veterinary services is made up of two branches, food inspection and animal medicine. The food inspection branch conducts initial, special, routine or follow-up inspections on local food sources or vendors that are currently selling or seeking approval to sell their products to the U.S. government as an approved source.

In Honduras, this can be quite challenging because most of the sites are not within easy driving distance. Many vendors have an extremely difficult time achieving acceptable standards. And while they cannot be expected to meet typical U.S. standards, there are some basic standards that must be met.

Inspectors also ensure that on base government assets such as the exchange and the troop issue subsistence activity, which is where all the food that is used in the dining facility is stored until needed, meet the highest standards. The troop issue subsistence activity is also the storage facility for the field rations that Soto Cano uses to support its various field missions. They ensure that proper storage methods are being adhered to, foods are being stored at the recommended temperatures, that each type of food is being handled appropriately and that the storage facilities themselves are being maintained adequately. They are also responsible for inspecting all field rations to ensure they are fit

for troop consumption.

The animal medicine branch is composed of veterinary officers and animal care specialists. At least once per quarter, the veterinarian conducts inspections of all the military dogs here on base. Those include the military working dog kennels and the rabies suspect kennels.

Currently, there are three military working dogs here on base. The veterinarian gives each a yearly physical exam as well as a routine exam every time they visit Soto Cano. The veterinarian also gives exams to any official mascot here at Soto Cano.

Care here includes routine surgical procedures, emergent surgical procedures at a contracted civilian veterinarian, if necessary, routine lab testing, and preventive health measures (vaccinations, parasite control, etc.).

By regulation, care is limited to treatment of dog or cat mascots. So the authorized pets here at Soto Cano, fish and birds, must be seen at a civilian veterinarian. The animal care specialist is also a member of the Rabies Advisory Board and lends information to it about possible rabies exposures and quarantine measures for the animal involved.

Veterinary services give their best to meet the needs of the service members stationed here.

BRIEFS

ESL Program

The Soto Cano Air Base Education Center will begin an English as a Second Language Program in the Spring 2001 in response to requests for ESL support. However, since changing "needs" should drive the training train, the ESL program is being written here and packaged from multimedia sources to include English grammar books, CD-ROM, etc. Videos are studied, and a pretest given in Akamai Workshops on and off duty hours. Regulations prohibit education officers from loaning out or "burning copies" of any copyrighted CD-ROM, software, televideos or cassettes. Even the ESO must get DOIM/J6 and contracting officers' permission to purchase and/or burn copies. For more information, call ext 4420.

PlayStation 2 Drawing

To ensure that all AAFES customers have an equal opportunity to purchase a PlayStation 2, customer drawings will be held for the opportunity to purchase a system. Customers must fill out a form with their name and phone number with one entry per authorized customer. Drawings will be held on Feb. 14 and 21 for the opportunity to buy a PlayStation 2. The winners will be announced on the Power Lizard between 8 and 10 a.m. Feb. 14 and 21.

Front Gate Policy

Remember to stop and check with the gate guard when departing the base. One of their roles is to ensure proper traffic flow and control of American personnel. Also, JSF personnel will not salute in the buses.

Stoppage of DLPT Test

The USARSO Education Services Office has stopped all DLPT exams in Puerto Rico and Soto Cano Air Base Education Center until USARSO hires a new educational services officer and test examiner; both will PCS soon. Bring in your DA Form 4187 to be scheduled on a first-come, first-serve basis; so your monthly Defense Language Proficiency Pay will not be interrupted. Call ext. 4495 for more information.

Black History Month

Joint Task Force-Bravo is observing Black History Month. A fashion and talent show is being planned and singers, dancers, comedians and musicians are needed. The talent show is scheduled for Feb. 24 at the Oasis Club. For more information or to try out for the show, contact SFC Denise Knox at ext. 4336 or 4623.

Hiking into the heavens of Laguna

By SPC Jeremy Heckler
Iguana Editor

Getting in tune with a higher power is something people of faith do to strengthen their beliefs. That may include climbing up the tallest mountain and trying to touch the sky.

A group of spiritual seekers did just that in the mountains around Comayagua, Honduras, recently.

To this group of hearty travelers, many of whom had taken on the challenges of Misery at Fort Knox, this was the ultimate challenge. Starting just off the beaten trail, these spiritual warriors headed for Laguna, a small village up in the mountains.

"This really gets people away from the routine activities and to focus on something else, like God's creation," said Chaplain (CPT) Arleigh vonSeggern, base chaplain. The mountain teased and taunted the group with flat spots on the road, then changed to a level steeper than the stair-stepper back at the gym. Each look backward led to panoramic views of Honduras. Maybe a few wondered how they got roped into this mess, others just took it all in stride.

"I enjoy being in the mountains and in the country," said SFC Denise Knox of ARFOR. "All the fresh air relaxes me and gives me time to think." She brought along a group of friends who had some trouble early on, but afterwards, they got the hang of it.

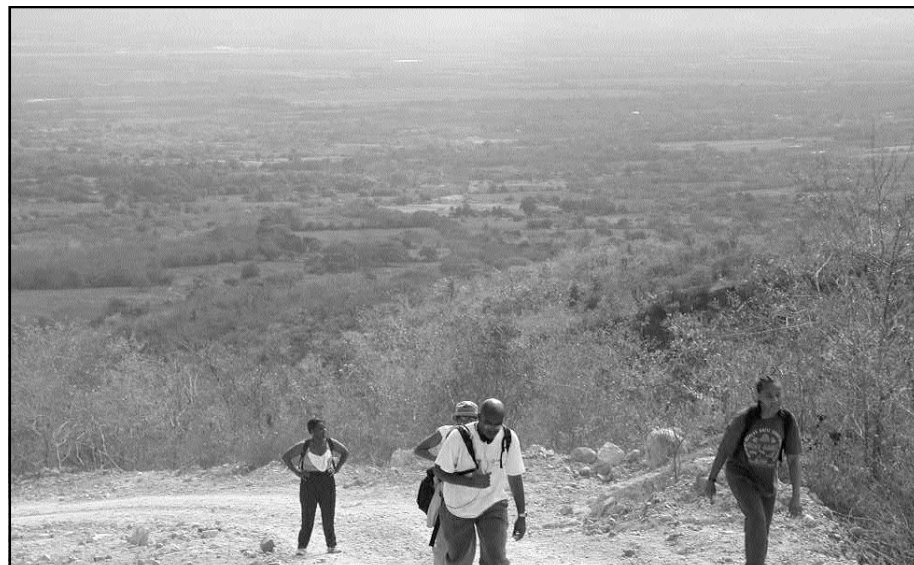


Photo by SPC Jeremy Heckler

Members of the Joint Task Force-Bravo chapel group hike to Laguna.

"A lot of them were mad at me going up the hill and asking themselves 'Why did I let Sergeant Knox talk me into this,' but after resting at the top of the mountain and heading back down, they felt a lot better," said Knox.

Reaching the crest of the mountain and the town of Laguna became the mental nirvana for some, as people kept telling themselves it was just a little bit further up. Mind and body started calling out "please let this stop."

Reaching the outskirts of Laguna, many of the weary travelers continued to march on, until some of the villagers pointed them toward their more hearty companions. There they found the lake and a picturesque view of the moun-

tains and scenery. It was there the group congregated, admiring the beauty of creation, glad to be sitting instead of standing and walking.

After a few moments of refreshment, it was off to the downhill trek. The trip, while easier, was also treacherous. The wrong step meant sliding down the mountain. The last thing mentioned before the group left Laguna was food and drinks were waiting in the van parked at the bottom. The land flattened out and many were wondering where the vans were, thinking that somehow the drivers had mercilessly parked further back after they had left until ... they saw the van and made the trip home.

Prepare those 2001 tax returns before April

By CPT Bradley Glaze
Command Judge Advocate

Tax season officially started with the receipt of your W-2 Forms from your employer. The Command Judge Advocate's office is preparing to help troops get their taxes filed on time. Additionally, we are here to assist you by answering questions that you may have about preparing your taxes. This year, federal income taxes must be postmarked by April 16 in order to be considered on time. Troops should not wait until then to file their taxes. The CJA's office is now taking appointments for tax preparation assistance services. The Command Judge Advocate's office will begin seeing clients Feb. 12. All personnel desiring assistance with their taxes should call as soon as possible and schedule an appointment.

This year, the CJA's office is planning to offer electronic filing of federal tax returns. Prior to arriving for an appointment, soldiers and airmen should ensure that they have the following documents and items:

- * Last year's federal income tax return
- * Mortgage interest statement (if any)
- * A W-2 (wage and earnings statement)
- * Alimony information (copy of divorce or separation agreement)
- * Form 1099 (interest statements from bank)
- * Any other financial information from the tax year
- * Social security numbers for all dependents that they claim on this year's taxes
- * Bank account number to which they want any refund deposited
- * Information on Individual Retirement Accounts if they did or planned to contribute
- * Bank's routing number (check with bank to make sure the correct number is provided)

When someone arrives in the CJA office, they will be asked to complete a questionnaire, requiring certain personal information necessary to prepare their income taxes. Once CJA personnel have completed the necessary forms with the information the

soldier or airman provides, they will ask the servicemember to review the forms and sign them. For those eligible for electronic filing, CJA will e-file their return and mail the necessary documents to the Internal Revenue Service.

The CJA's office does not have the forms or the software to prepare state income tax returns. Assistance for state income tax returns will be given on a case-by-case basis based upon the level of expertise required to complete the return. Prior to requesting assistance with these returns, individuals should first visit the state tax form website and obtain the forms and instructions for the state in which they are filing. A link to this site can be found at H:\J-Staff\CJA\Tax 2000\Links to State Tax Forms.htm. This site also contains useful information in preparing individual state tax forms and information on contacting individual state income tax agencies for assistance.

For additional questions regarding income tax preparation, call the command judge advocate's office at ext. 4546.